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"Justice Matters": A Multi-faceted Implementation of Catholic Social Teaching across the Curriculum

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A group of first-year students sat around a table, slightly nervous because this was to be their first contact with someone who knew from within the crisis they had studied. He had just arrived from Honduras, the departure point of unaccompanied minors fleeing north. They had studied this humanitarian situation that made headlines, but now they were to speak with someone who would be able to confirm their expertise—or expose their deficiency. This someone was the Catholic Relief Services country director for Honduras, Juan Sheenan. The students had not only studied the crisis, but devised a simulation and performed it with several hundred participants. Now they were to meet a man who dealt with this issue every day. At first, he explained the origins of the crisis, the current state of things, and how CRS was working to address systemic issues of poverty, job opportunities, and safety. He then asked the students why they became involved, which is to say their motivation.

Each student explained how he or she had been personally touched in the class in some way. Time and again the students made the issue their own. Several said that they imagined the unaccompanied minors to be their own younger brothers and sisters. One student said, "I know I would never be able to make that journey, and I definitely know my little sister wouldn't be able to […]. And I know I wouldn't want to leave my home the way they were forced to leave their homes […]. *I put myself in their shoes, and I wanted to do something about it. It's not fair* for them to leave their homes when they shouldn't have to" (emphasis added). A second student recounted how what had been at first a distant issue became something closer and more personal. It not only touched her, it called for her response: "I was of the mindset that this was something awful that was happening but something that was happening in another country. But when I learned how involved we in the US actually are in the problems […], I felt that we had – that *I had – this obligation* to then go in and help. It was no longer something just happening just in another country" (emphasis added). A third student recounted how she developed knowledge and views different

from what she had absorbed prior to coming to college: "When we first started studying unaccompanied minors, I thought that they were coming in and taking our jobs. That was my mindset because what was how the adults in my life saw it. But learning and reading [the book] *Enrique's Journey* and other articles, it really *opened my mind and broke my heart*" (emphasis added). For her, the experience of learning and participating in engaged learning activities not only gave her a new way of thinking, but touched her deeply.

This group of first-year students expressed that they each had developed a personal, moral, and perhaps even spiritual connection to the issue at hand. The object of our studies was no longer distant and abstract, but called for their involvement. These students are examples of young adults ready for and prepared to develop a set of values. What might be the role of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) in their moral formation? Can a single course do more than raise questions, open minds, introduce vocabulary, provide a beginning? Or is a coordinated series of experiences needed to lead students to a life-long commitment to social justice?

The challenges to faculty committed to the role of CST in the formation of students are many and major. To begin with, is the formation of students in line with CST beyond the scope of what can or should be accomplished? Should we be content with mastery of the material, as we would be with many other subjects? Or are we hoping to influence attitudes, values, and behavior? If so, to what extent? Further, what are effective inputs in the instructor's control within a course? Within a program? Within four years? What are the myriad variables in a student's life that affect attitude and behavior? And then, of course, how do we assess effectiveness of the student's mastery and development, of the course, of a program, of a cohort at graduation, and of alumni's lives after graduation? What are the markers of success at each stage? What collegiate experiences will be needed, in a course and afterwards, to help these students mature so that CST guides choices and actions in their future lives?

Cabrini College has committed itself over the last six year to modifying its curriculum, co-curricular activities, and institutional climate to address some of these questions. The following discussion briefly outlines some of the approaches Cabrini has taken in the hopes that they might prove instructive for faculty and student life professionals at other Catholic colleges and universities. The experience after six years of focused effort indicates that course work, experiential learning, and a variety of curricular and co-curricular opportunities must be pursued

in order to cultivate students' dispositions and develop their desire to pursue a commitment to social justice.

The College's Mission

Catholic Social Teaching is explicitly taught in Cabrini's Religious Studies department. But beyond instruction in this department, on a cross-college level, beginning in 2014 the vocabulary and values of CST were embedded in the learning outcomes of core curriculum courses.

Cabrini's approach starts with its mission statement, titled "An Education of the Heart," a phrase from St. Frances Cabrini's informal philosophy of education. The phrase suggests the importance of character formation and values as part of the purpose of education. There is no doubt that education for St. Frances Cabrini involved the formation of values and character and attention to a student's soul.[1] The mission statement is just two sentences long but contains several phrases relevant to our discussion: "*Cabrini College is a Catholic institution of higher education dedicated to academic excellence, leadership development, and a commitment to social justice. The College welcomes learners of all faiths, cultures, and backgrounds and prepares them to become engaged citizens of the world*" (emphasis added). This mission statement is clear about particular goals: a commitment to social justice and producing engaged citizens. It has provided guidance for the multiple extensive ways this college has implemented those goals in the curriculum, faculty development, and co-curriculum.

Core Curriculum

The core curriculum is central to Cabrini's approach to CST. In 2008, the faculty approved a core curriculum that came to be called "Justice Matters." The centerpiece of the curriculum consists of three required, developmentally linked core courses, called "Engagements with the Common Good" (ECG), followed by a senior capstone in a student's major, all focused on the common good and social justice. Each course approaches the common good from a different perspective. The first-year course gives primacy to self-reflection and exploration of the multiple communities of which one is a part. The sophomore-year course emphasizes the student's engagement in the community, with community partners, and a growing understanding of "how power, privilege, and difference

affect solidarity, equality, and dignity," as well as the process of social change. The third course deepens the student's understanding of the root causes of injustice and enables students to contribute to community partners through research and advocacy. Finally, in the senior capstone in the major, students are encouraged to "integrate the practice of social justice with their personal, professional, and career goals."[2]

The learning outcomes of the Engagements courses in the core have gone through two iterations. The first set of learning outcomes from 2008 was written in rather general terms: "Students will critique their personal philosophy of social justice grounded in dignity, equality, and solidarity."[3] The second, revised learning outcomes, implemented the 2014–15 academic year, include terms and concepts from CST. For example, the following learning outcome is from ECG 300:

> Students will demonstrate—by articulating how their disposition to the Mission of Cabrini College has changed since they took ECG 100 and ECG 200—if and in which ways efforts towards a more inclusive and socially just worldview reflect their own beliefs and the lens of terms and concepts like human dignity, right relationships, solidarity, human rights, environmental sustainability, concern for the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable, and the common good.[4]

Every Cabrini student since 2009 has taken this required course sequence as part of the core curriculum, with its essential focus on social justice and the common good. Now with the revised learning outcomes, the key concepts of Catholic Social Teaching are embedded in each course.

Faculty Development

It is important to point out that these Engagements with the Common Good courses are taught primarily by full-time faculty drawn from departments across the curriculum. Faculty members may propose topics for approval by a curriculum committee. A wide variety of topics are taught on the three levels. While the topics are broad, all courses must serve common learning outcomes. For assessment, all students are given a common assignment and must submit a signature assignment that demonstrates the learning outcomes. The signature assignments in the core are assessed on a rotation. (The new signature assignments that incorporate the language of CST introduced in 2014–15 have not yet been assessed.)

Clearly, to teach social justice courses rooted in CST requires considerable faculty development. In the most recent semester, twenty-five mostly tenured or tenure-track instructors (out of a faculty of eighty-four) were teaching these courses. Faculty Development has paved the way for such significant involvement. Faculty members see these courses to be at the heart of the College.[5] The College allocates significant resources to faculty development, with special attention to development for mission.

The principal means of faculty development for mission has been what is called the Faculty Mission Academy. This is a voluntary, three-phase exploration designed to prepare instructors to understand the College's mission and to introduce CST as a resource for their courses, particularly the ECG. Accordingly, two of the goals of the Academy are focused on assisting faculty to understand CST. Faculty are to "explore the core principles of Catholic Social Teaching within their own belief system" and to "articulate how their courses relate to CST concepts such as the dignity of the individual realized in community, the common good, the option for the poor."

The Academy consists of three phases over the course of a year. Each phase is three days and two nights off-site. The first phase, in May of the first year, focuses on learning and exploring. In this phase, faculty study common documents such as *Doing FaithJustice* by Fred Kammer and J. Milburn Thompson's *Introducing Catholic Social Thought*. Particular attention is paid to how faculty from various faith traditions other than Catholic might relate to and participate in a curricular lens based in CST.

The second phase of the Faculty Mission Academy, also two nights and three days but now over the Christmas break, immerses faculty into several hands-on experiences. Most recently, faculty have participated in the SNAP Food Stamp Challenge for three days, in which they budgeted, purchased, and shared meals on the $4.50 allotted for food stamp purchases. Additionally, faculty participated in community-based programs that serve people who are without reliable housing. Finally, faculty did political advocacy for low-income housing. During this phase, learning and discussions continues around CST and community engagement. In particular, faculty study Catholic Relief Services' model of Integral Human Development to guide their observation of and immersion in communities. This model emphasizes understanding the multiple dimensions of assets a community possesses.[6]

The third and final phase of the Faculty Academy, two nights and three days after commencement, provides an opportunity for reflection "to enable faculty to apply their

foundational understanding [of mission and CST] to their curriculum, advising, research, and teaching" in order to "build the foundation for continuing and deepening professional development on the intersection of mission and discipline." It should be noted that the three phases of the Academy parallel in an abbreviated manner the experiences and learning that form the three ECG courses.

Nearly half of the full-time faculty have participated in the Academy. Ninety-two percent of the first cohort reported they understood the core principles of CST after participating in the Academy. Such extensive and committed buy-in by a broad range of faculty across disciplines to the mission of the College, to social justice, and to values and concepts rooted in CST provides instructors in our core curriculum with a common vocabulary, a common set of readings and discussion, and common experiences similar to those in the three Engagements courses.

The Faculty Mission Academy has had a profound effect upon Cabrini's faculty. The faculty has long had a commitment to a core curriculum dedicated to social justice. In the early 1990s, Cabrini was among the first colleges in Pennsylvania to incorporate engaged learning in the community. When the requirement was introduced as part of a junior-year course twenty-five years ago, the faculty explicitly distinguished it from community service and stipulated that the purpose was to learn from communities and to study systemic injustices and long-term solutions. So when the core curriculum was revised and the number of social justice courses was increased from a single course, the faculty was receptive, though not all faculty were comfortable with the explicit attention to CST. However, beginning in 2001, Cabrini developed a deep relationship with Catholic Relief Services (CRS), including a formal partnership signed in 2005. Cabrini faculty collaborated with CRS personnel to work on mutually beneficial projects. At least annually, CRS personnel would meet with Cabrini instructors to discuss how an organization can be Catholic yet embrace employees from diverse faith and value traditions. CRS became for Cabrini a model of an institution that lives a social justice mission rooted in CST but explicitly open to members of all faith traditions.[7] Against this background, the Faculty Mission Academy became for Cabrini faculty the forum within which individuals could negotiate their own understanding of how they could maintain their individual values yet collaborate in a common endeavor around the College's mission.[8]

Department Curriculum

As noted above, the Justice Matters curriculum implements a focus on social justice through a coordinated sequence of developmentally linked courses taken in the first, second, and third years, known as Engagements with the Common Good. A fourth course in this sequence is located in each student's major as the senior-year capstone course. This course is designed to provide "a coherent, Mission-informed high impact learning experience at the undergraduate level" (Middle States Report 2015). The Communication Department, of which I am a member, has had extensive experience with a social justice capstone course. Throughout the first decade of the 2000s, the capstone project was implicitly on a topic of social concern. However, beginning in 2009, the department introduced a new learning outcome named Communicating for the Common Good: "Students, through their media creations, should be able to promote understanding, compassion, and action for the Common Good. As a result of their courses and projects in the core curriculum and major, they should exhibit the integration of the theory, values, practices, and advocacy of social justice in their communication work" (Communication Department Learning Outcomes 2009). The Communication Department takes seriously the role media play in shaping the vision and values of media consumers and believes that CST can provide a life-long ethical framework for media practitioners. As the ACCU's Vision Statement points out: "The goal of incorporating CST across the curriculum can serve as one way of deepening the dialogue between the disciplines in which each makes its own 'distinct contribution in the search for solutions.' (*Ex corde Ecclesiae*, 32)."[9]

All courses in the major contribute in some way to preparing students to meet the Communicating for the Common Good Learning Outcome, but the outcomes are best seen in senior students' capstone projects.[10] All senior projects are group-produced multimedia websites on some significant social justice issue. Professor Cathy Yungmann, who has taught a section of the capstone since the social justice learning outcome was implemented, describes the capstone this way: "Designed both as a portfolio piece for students and as an assessment tool for department learning outcomes, the required Communication Department capstone course could be considered the culmination of the college's four-year Engagements with the Common Good (ECG) core curriculum. Students spend considerable time researching a social justice issue, interview primary sources, and create multiple media about the topic. They then publish their work as a web site"

(see examples at cabrini.edu/convergence). To prepare students for this culminating project, department faculty draw on students' knowledge of social justice gained in the core ECG courses.

When social justice and CST become integral to students' majors, a new and transformative dynamic is introduced. While all students take three ECG social justice courses, for many students through their junior year, those courses remain "just" core courses. The major, for most students, is what is actually important. In the capstone, Communication Department faculty try to show how the wedding of one's major with a deep understanding of difficult societal issues can benefit one's career. When students understand that knowledge of social justice issues and production of media pieces on these issues can help their career, at least some students no longer consider CST merely as information acquired "over there in the core," but as skills significant to their future. In this context, CST can be taught as a useful observational and analytic tool to examine societal problems. Instead of analyzing issues just from the viewpoint of politics or economics, students use the lens of CST to understand the impact of issues on the most poor and vulnerable, the effect on the planet, and whether human dignity is enhanced.

By way of example, a recent project focused on systemic causes and solutions to hunger in America. A website produced by the team of seniors in 2015 won a national Silver Davey Award in the category of Social Responsibility Media (ServingFoodSolutions.com). In preparation for major projects, the department has developed a worksheet based on CST themes to help students undertake a systemic analysis of social justice issues. Another senior capstone course, focused on Underserved Students in Higher Education, systematically uses CST themes as heuristics to examine the issue of access to higher education. Using the theme of Human Dignity, for example, students might observe: "Underserved students deserve *equitable* access to, participation in, and successful completion of, educational programs that will put them on a path to upward mobility and opportunities for a better life" (worksheet from Prof. Dawn Francis's COM 472 course Fall 2015). Using the theme of Preferential Option for the Poor, students might respond: "We must pursue—and urge people in power to pursue—educational reforms. We have to champion new policies and practices that seek to end disparities in educational outcomes among underserved student populations in higher ed. We need to evaluate the impact of these reforms to be sure they're truly serving the underserved."

In preparation for senior year capstone projects, each student each semester meets with his or her adviser to discuss progress in meeting the department learning objectives, including

"Communicating for the Common Good." The students use a worksheet to organize their progress. In the fall, students must write and discuss: (a) Goals this year to develop this competency; and (b) Steps you will take to achieve these goals. In the spring, they must write and discuss: (a) What knowledge and skills did you develop this year as you took the steps to achieve this competency? (b) What portfolio pieces did you produce this year related to this competency? List them. And, (c) What goals do you have for next year related to this competency? Thus, each year in their major, all students will discuss their understanding of social justice and progress toward producing media that "promote understanding, compassion, and action for the common good." Finally, communication faculty assess the work of seniors each year, using a rubric based on the social justice learning outcome. In the first assessment of this learning outcome in academic year 2010–11, sixty-eight percent of students scored Unsatisfactory. But after implementing the more thorough individual reports, in academic year 2012–13, only thirty percent of the students scored Unsatisfactory.

Engaged Pedagogy: Simulations

The first day of class in August with a new group of first-year students in a core social justice class poses many challenges. CST and social justice are among the furthest things from the mind of an 18-year-old on the first day of school. Roommates, fitting in, nostalgia for the beach, sports, and pop culture pretty much fill the mind of most new arrivals. One approach that has proved successful, however, has been to involve the class in constructing a simulation of an issue. One ECG course, titled Our Interdependent World, focuses on issues of global justice. Drawing on the resources of Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the course attempts to expand students' horizon of concern and to "foster education about the realities that impact the global poor and invite a deeper commitment to act on behalf of all people who live on the margins" (see http://education.crs.org/get-involved-with-crs/crs-programs/).

The students quoted at the beginning of this essay were in this course studying, among other topics, the sudden influx of unaccompanied minors from Central America. The primary text for this portion of the course was *Enrique's Journey*. Supplementing this book were numerous news articles and political, social, and legal analyses to provide a multi-faceted understanding. As students grappled with dimensions of the crisis and learned about systemic causes, CST became a

major lens through which to think about what was happening and to analyze how the U.S. government and individuals were responding.

The students were given the challenge to construct a simulation in which they would role-play key aspects of what they learned in order to convey the complex reality of unaccompanied minors to a generally uninformed audience. To prepare this simulation, they had three weeks until Cabrini Day in mid-November, on which the entire College participates in mission-focused activities. They were told how much space and time they would have to interact with participants and given guidelines about how role-playing simulations work, a small budget for materials, and general goals they should try to achieve with participants. They also learned that portions of the six classes leading up to the day could be devoted to problem-solving and rehearsals, but that considerable group work and study outside of class would be necessary.[11]

The class was divided into three equal groups, with care that sufficient leadership was present in each group. Class discussion led to a division of labor. Group 1 focused on the "push factors" of immigration and systemic causes—like gang violence and extreme poverty—that were forcing families to send their children out of Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador. Group 2 focused on conditions at the U.S. border, in particular how the legal system and detention centers treated the minors. Group 3 focused on reflection and advocacy, in preparation for a period of time at the end of the simulation when students would guide participants to reflect on the experience. The students in each group were asked to construct an activity to instruct and motivate others about the crisis. Empowered to instruct and engage others, they themselves increased their own engagement.[12] Their hope was to interest several hundred participants to learn more and to respond by advocating to Congress and the President. (This simulation was awarded a grant by CRS and the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities in order to document it and make it available as a model for use by other groups. See refugeesseekingsafety.org).

This was not the first time that simulations had been attempted as means to interest and activate first-year students. One year students created a simulation on migration; in 2015, they created a simulation on climate change, using the resources of the CRS Faculty Learning Commons and Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si'*.

Several key factors should be noted that contribute to the powerful effect these social justice simulations have on students' learning:

1) a supportive group or community;
2) a classroom coach who models leadership and passion for social justice; and
3) a public platform that requires students to take a personal stand on what they are learning.

As for (1) a supportive group or community: In the simulation concerned with the crisis of unaccompanied minors from Central America, it was crucial that each group saw itself as essential to the success of the whole. It also made a difference that the simulation was to be performed with several hundred participants. Peer pressure to achieve is strong. Relationships, so important to first-year students, figure as another important motivator. As one student put it: "We push each other to keep going." Another student reflected that, in addition to understanding that it was an important project to do, there was a social aspect to the work. They were doing the project with their friends whom they didn't want to disappoint.

As for (2) a student classroom coach: An older peer can be an invaluable asset. An upper-class student who has had several social justice courses and who is involved in campus social justice activities can be a model of someone with independent motivation for social justice. As one student noted about her class's coach, "She was so passionate about social justice issues, it lit a fire in me because she lit up the room when she spoke about these issues."

As for (3) a public platform: To perform a simulation in public requires that students speak convincingly to others who may be less informed or even in disagreement. Accordingly, the students must put themselves in the mindset of their audience. The students also have to think through their own values as they are developing a public voice. For, in public, they must "own" what they say. Somewhat paradoxically then, giving students a public platform makes them more reflective about themselves and what values they really want to embrace.

The students who constructed the simulation concerned with the crisis of unaccompanied minors from Central America had the opportunity to repeat it on two other occasions. In the second and third iterations of the simulation, the stakes were even higher, with the audience consisting of people who had expertise in the subject of unaccompanied minors and in CST. The feedback the students received required them to learn more and become more expert.[13] How appropriate that the students first conducted their simulation on Cabrini Day, in honor of St. Frances Cabrini, patron saint of immigrants!

Leadership Development

As students move through the core curriculum and develop knowledge of CST and social justice issues, some seek a deeper engagement. The CRS Ambassador Program provides opportunities for deepening knowledge of CST. Within the Ambassador Program, Cabrini is piloting advanced opportunities for social justice leadership by initiating "Global Justice Peer Educators." Global Justice Peer Educators are leaders within the CRS Ambassador Program who develop resources, lead programs, and train others about issues of global justice. Concretely, they might develop educational modules to present in classes, lead residence hall programs, or do outreach to high school and parish groups. The student prepare to do this work by participating in at least three semesters of education in the CRS Faculty Learning Commons, which offers online course materials, drawn from CRS's extensive programs around the world, for use by faculty to supplement existing courses.[14] The ultimate goal of the Global Justice Peer Educator Program is to increase the depth of knowledge and commitment of students in working for the common good.

Post-graduate

Graduates tell us that one of the greatest challenges they face after graduation is finding a new environment rich in ideas and values, a supportive community like the one Cabrini has provided, and further opportunities for growth. When they graduate, alumni are too often on their own. Keeping graduates connected to and growing in the values of CST is an important contribution a college can make. To this end, Cabrini has launched an alumni program that also draws upon the resources of the CRS Faculty Learning Commons. Like the Theology on Tap programs found in parishes and at some colleges and universities, Cabrini offers Global Justice on Tap. Topics offered by CRS in the Faculty Learning Commons include climate change (fall 2015); fair and ethical trade (spring 2016); and Catholic peace building (fall 2016).

Conclusion

The tradition and mission of each Catholic institution, the composition of its faculty, the priorities of administrators, the background of its student body, and the shape of its curriculum all provide constraints and opportunities for the introduction of CST. Cabrini's model was shaped by faculty-driven leadership, nurtured by an administration willing to invest in faculty development, and advanced by the College's special relationship with CRS. The result has been a multi-faceted approach in which social justice and CST run through the fabric of the institution.

Notes

1. See Sullivan 1992.
2. See http://www.cabrini.edu/Academics/Core-Curriculum-Justice-Matters/Engagements-with-the-Common-Good/.
3. Cabrini College 2013.
4. Ibid.
5. On the importance of faculty for implementing a college or university's mission, see Heft 2015.
6. See Heinrich et al. 2008.
7. See Laver 2008.
8. See Hodge 2011 on the importance of drawing upon the spiritual traditions of all faculty.
9. Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities 2012.
10. Compare Kecskes and Kerrigan 2009.
11. See Smith and Boyer 1996 for best practices for simulations.

12. See Meyers and Jones 1993.

13. Francis and Colbry 2016, in press, analyzed the leadership development that occurred in this simulation.

14. See Harrison et al. 2010.

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